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AN INVITATION TO STRUGGLE - THE BOSNIA DEPLOYMENT

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In Bosnia, this terrible war has challenged our interests and troubled our souls. Thankfully, we can do something about it. I say again our mission will be clear, limited, and achievable. The people of Bosnia, our NATO allies, and people all around the world are now looking to America for leadership. So let us lead.¹

Why did President Clinton override Congressional opinion and send troops to Bosnia to support the Dayton Accords? How did he manage to obtain funding from the Congress for an operation which the majority did not support? We would prefer to believe that our senior leaders took a mature, problem-solving approach and, through rational debate, patriotic support, and humanitarian concern, arrived at a consensus to support the deployment because it was in the best interest of the nation. Such was not the case. The decision to deploy troops to Bosnia and the subsequent funding battle was a complex affair, involving bureaucratic politics at every turn. Morton Halperin and Graham Allison have provided a framework that enables us to examine the Bosnia deployment in terms of the interaction between two branches of government. Policy games, as well as decision games, permeated the process. Although the Department of Defense and the American public were involved, they had limited roles in this struggle. The two key players were the executive branch, represented by the President, and the legislative branch, represented by several members of Congress, the most prominent being Senator Bob Dole (R-KS). This paper will examine the historical context, conduct an analysis of the players and their positions (for/against sending troops to Bosnia), and provide a brief analysis of the high-level negotiations (i.e., action games) that culminated in an agreement to fund the initial one-year Bosnia deployment.

Context

As the guns fell silent around Sarajevo on October 11, 1995, President Clinton faced yet another foreign policy dilemma much like those that had plagued his Administration since January 1993. The Clinton Administration spent nearly two years wallowing in foreign policy quagmires and answering charges of advocating a capricious and highly-reactive foreign policy. Somalia was a democracy-building disaster and, although the administration ultimately achieved success in Haiti, film clips of rogue gangs refusing to allow the USS Harlan County to dock at Port-au-Prince lingered in the minds of the American public.²

Bosnia had been a foreign policy issue since late 1991. In fact, during the 1992 election campaign, Clinton pushed President Bush to take action to stop the massive suffering in the Balkans. With Bush's defeat, Clinton assumed the mantle of moral responsibility as leader of the most powerful democracy in the world. He faced several tough challenges. The Congress, opposed to armed intervention, was no longer a Democratic stomping ground. Republicans had surged into open Congressional seats, achieving a majority in both houses for the first time in years.³ Partisanship would definitely play a role in any action President Clinton would seek to accomplish in Bosnia. He moved very slowly, proclaiming that he would not send U.S. armed forces to "fight a war" and, further, that he would seek Congressional approval prior to sending any U.S. forces to Bosnia. CNN continued to broadcast images and reports of mass slaughter, war camps, and genocide by the Bosnian Serbs, raising considerable public concern to do something about the suffering. Several NATO nations expressed concern over the Bosnian situation and requested U.S. support. The U.S., to bolster a hapless UN effort thus far, became actively engaged in brokering a solution to the Bosnian problem. Ultimately, U.S. air power convinced the Serbs that their aggressiveness had run its course.⁴ Talks were held in Dayton,

Ohio, where the “warring” factions--Serbs, Croats, and Bosnians--agreed to a U S -developed peace plan. Key to consummating this agreement was a promise by President Clinton to provide U S armed forces to implement the terms of the Dayton Accords. This promise had been made without consulting the Congress, despite the Administration’s previous commitment to do so. By October 1995, President Clinton found himself on the horns of a foreign policy dilemma. He was aware that neither Congress nor the American people would support the deployment of U S forces to a hostile area without sound justification, yet his word and the U S reputation had been placed “on the line” when he promised to send U.S. troops to Bosnia. NATO nations had agreed to participate provided the U S did so. Secretary of State Warren Christopher noted, “The only way [the Bosnian leaders] would enter into a settlement is if the U S is involved in the implementation.”⁵ It is unlikely the Bosnians would have trusted any nation other than the U S to lead the peace plan implementation. In short, the Administration had committed itself to resolving the Bosnian crisis. President Clinton decided to send U S troops to Bosnia despite the objections of Congress.

A popular quote on Capitol Hill proclaims, “Where you sit is where you stand.” The Administration’s reasons for sending U S forces to Bosnia fell into four categories: Presidential power as Commander-in-Chief, Bosnia as a U S vital interest, U S prestige and leadership, and humanitarianism. For each argument, the Republican Congress had a rejoinder.

President as Commander-in-Chief

President Clinton, like his recent predecessors, adopted a hard-line stance in defending the President’s prerogative to dispatch troops overseas. He vowed to “consult” with Congress, but stopped well short of seeking Congressional approval for the deployment. Although Clinton

and his top aides repeatedly indicated that they would welcome legislative authorization of the Bosnia mission should Congress choose to give it, the President insisted that, as Commander-in-Chief, he had the authority to deploy the forces under Article II, Section 2, of the U S Constitution ⁶ The Administration further maintained that, although there were risks involved, hostilities had ended in Bosnia, and a Congressional “declaration” would be inappropriate for an operation intended to be peaceful in nature Clinton, at no time, had any intention of requesting authorization from Congress

Clinton’s patronizing remarks chafed the Republican-led Congress A number of Congressmen were still smarting from previous Clinton actions in both Somalia and Haiti that ignored the 1973 War Powers Resolution The House went so far as to pass a bill sponsored by Joel Hefley which would have tied the President’s hands as Commander-in-Chief, requiring him to receive Congressional approval prior to deploying troops to Bosnia for any purpose ⁷ Some House Democrats criticized the bill as being a political tool, but Dole, the Senate Majority Leader, ultimately played his own “decision game” and rendered Hefley’s bill a symbolic gesture by refusing to bring it to the Senate floor for a vote Instead, the Republican Senators crafted a list of criteria for peace agreements that they would insist be met prior to sending U S forces abroad Although included in later documents on peacekeeping criteria, the list did not play a significant role ⁸

A U.S. Vital National Interest?

The Clinton Administration believed that at least three vital national interests were at stake in the Bosnian conflict First, it argued that, if the U S did not intervene, the war would widen, possibly involving NATO allies like Greece and Turkey as antagonists, and threaten

European stability Keeping Europe out of war was clearly a U S interest—Europe being the United States' second largest trading partner Second, a spreading war would threaten the lives and security of U S citizens residing and working in Europe Third, if the U S did not intervene, NATO's credibility as an effective post-Cold War alliance would deteriorate. A crumbling NATO could provide no collective security umbrella for growing democracies The fractious anarchy in the Balkans could push the Continent toward instability Such a situation could then threaten Russia, a state with a developing interest in the peace process and in search of a larger role on the world stage ⁹

Congress countered that Bosnia was neither at the heart of Europe nor a vital U S national interest Congressional Republicans submitted that war in Bosnia had been going on for years and that Europe--as well as the European economy--were in fine shape They failed to see how an alliance powerful enough to usher in the collapse of the Soviet Union could fall apart as a result of the conflict in Bosnia The Congress perceived Bosnia as a European show and, although recognizing that U S fortunes were closely linked to those of Western Europe, they saw the Bosnian conflict as potentially damaging to NATO should casualties begin to mount ¹⁰

U.S. Prestige and Leadership

The Clinton Administration argued that not sending U S troops to Bosnia would be perceived by other nations as a failure of U S leadership, contribute to diminished American prestige, and weaken U S alliances In the Administration's opinion, the U S could ill afford a tarnished reputation. America's commitment to leadership would be questioned if it refused to participate in implementing a peace agreement which was brokered in the U S , especially in light of the fact that the presidents of Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia had requested U S

participation. With weakened partnerships and a vacillating stance, the U.S.' ability to secure its interests and convince other nations to participate in economic or security initiatives would be greatly undermined. The only force capable of implementing the peace was NATO, and the U.S. should participate with the other nations in order to maintain its stature as the world's leading superpower and promote its interests abroad. Finally, a perceived lack of U.S. resolve could encourage other nations or organizations to take actions that would endanger our soldiers and citizens abroad. The Clinton Administration could not and would not allow the U.S. to go back on its word.

The Republican Congress disagreed, stating that if both U.S. leadership and the NATO alliance would be at risk were the U.S. not to lead the NATO intervention, then both were in serious trouble. Bosnia did not amount to a "raison d'être" for NATO. Further, the Congress noted that the U.S. would not be demonstrating leadership, but rather "followership" by deploying troops to Bosnia.¹¹ In their estimation, making a bad decision (i.e., deploying forces to Bosnia) to go along with the wishes of other European countries would hardly increase America's stature in the world. They had reached a consensus that the mission was doomed to fail, and although, in the short run, opposing the deployment might be unpopular with our allies, in the long run, we could preclude future embarrassment. The U.S. still had plenty of power and influence without having to squander valuable resources on the Bosnia mission.

Humanitarian Concerns

The Administration's final reason for deploying U.S. forces to Bosnia was humanitarian concern. As President Clinton remarked in his address to the nation on November 27, 1995, "Let us never forget a quarter of a million men, women and children have been shelled, shot and

tortured to death.” The President honestly believed that U S intervention could end the suffering of the people in Bosnia Terminating the warfare, mass executions, ethnic cleansing and campaigns of rape and terror was the “right thing to do ”¹² An end to the fighting would allow two million people, half the Bosnian population, to return to their homes and end their miserable existence as refugees The U S had been asked to participate and, as the world’s most powerful democratic nation, had a moral responsibility to do what it could to curtail the suffering Most importantly, the Administration was convinced that only the U S military could achieve such a potentially dangerous mission

The Congress acknowledged that there had been tremendous suffering in Bosnia, but insisted that Europe had forces capable of solving this problem Several members, including Senator Dole, argued that the suffering would not have been so great had President Clinton not vetoed the bill to unilaterally lift an international arms embargo against the Bosnian Muslims In Dole’s opinion, the aforesaid bill probably would have checked the Serb advance much earlier and saved thousands of lives ¹³ During his campaign, President Clinton said he would support lifting the embargo Once he gained office, he failed to keep that promise Such an act was one of several which gave the Congress the impression that President Clinton was not only undermining their authority but deceiving them as well Examples of the President snubbing Congressional input included his deployment of troops to Somalia, his intervention in Haiti, his refusal to lift the Bosnia Muslim arms embargo and, most recently, his refusal to sign the 1996 Defense Authorization Bill because he disagreed with Congress on several major programs, the most prominent being balancing the budget and continued funding for the B-2 Bomber

The Congress had additional reasons for not supporting the deployment to Bosnia They believed that the Dayton Accords had produced a false peace, and that the implementation force

(IFOR) execution plan was ambiguous and incomplete. The Dayton Accords were hastily conceived and did not consider the ethnic issues of the region. Not all key players in the conflict were party to the agreement. Rogue military forces were still wreaking havoc in Bosnia. The Dayton Accords did not provide a clear requirement for the U.S. As a result, IFOR's plan was sketchy at best. No clear goals had been established, no exit strategy developed. The Congress was very concerned that this ambiguity would lead to another "mission creep" scenario similar to the Somalia debacle.¹⁴ Essentially, the Congress equated the lack of a definitive strategy to a formula for needless loss of U.S. military lives.

President Clinton also had a personal interest in securing the peace in Bosnia. Although he ran on a domestic platform and the economy was faring reasonably well, his most recent adverse press was in the area of foreign policy. He needed a success badly. Clinton realized that by intimately involving the U.S. in the Dayton Accords, he had tied Dayton's success and peace in Bosnia to the 1996 Presidential campaign. He would have to rally the Democrats in Congress to support his initiatives. Essentially, there were two action channels available to him. He could work closely with Congress to obtain authorization or, as Commander-in-Chief, he could order the forces to deploy. The former was the most preferred method but offered little hope of success. Clinton sensed the Republicans would not support his decision without some sort of negotiation. The latter option was more controversial and was likely to aggravate the Congress and the American people. Although this was the least preferred method, it could be accomplished quickly. Clinton had already promised U.S. military participation in IFOR.¹⁵ He had "crossed the Rubicon."

The Games Begin

The President took his case to the American public attempting to sway Congress by going directly to its constituency. He also attempted to win over Congressional leaders. Public support remained skeptical, with a CBS poll indicating that 50% of those surveyed opposed sending U.S. troops to the Balkans. In Congress, although some Democrats rallied to the President's camp, the Republicans held firm. There would be no approval from Congress. The most preferred action channel had been shut down. With time growing short and the other nations of NATO and the UN pressing for a commitment, President Clinton, after conferring with "key national security policy makers," ordered the deployment, invoking his right to do so as the Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Armed Forces (the least-preferred action channel). The President believed that he could deploy the forces and gain funding for them after the fact based upon Congress' track record in enforcing the power of the purse under the 1973 War Powers Resolution. He was convinced that Congress would not abandon the deployed sons and daughters of their constituency. Further, he had indicated that the forces would only be deployed for one year, which he believed worked in his favor. Soldiers would begin redeployment prior to the 1996 presidential election and, with a definite timetable, Congress would be more inclined to support the mission. In spite of his failure to build support for his programs with an aggressive selling program through the media to the American public, and in spite of his failure to bring in key Congressional Republican leaders early on to sell/broker a deal, Clinton still believed he could prevail over Congressional opposition.

Unfortunately for the President, his timing was bad. He began to feel media pressure on both domestic and foreign policy issues. Congress continued to play a policy game and

discussed resolutions condemning the President's decisions but supporting the deployed troops. The inability to produce a balanced 1996 budget with Congress became a significant issue. Partisan politics were abundant. President Clinton played a decision game by vetoing the funding bill. As a result, the government shut down temporarily, closing several federal buildings, museums, and national parks. Public debate centered on the President's decisions with regard to funding issues. The significance of the Bosnia deployment was questioned by partisan Republicans and syndicated columnists alike. Concerned that public opinion would spur Congress to take action to prohibit the Bosnia deployment, the Clinton team was forced to negotiate with Republican leaders.

The budget negotiations comprised a decision game which provided the breakthrough for funding the Bosnia deployment. Although President Clinton had vetoed previous Congressional submissions of the 1996 defense authorization bill, he allowed the same bill to become law on December 1, 1995, without his signature. Clinton permitted Congress' addition of the B-2 Bomber, transport ships (LHD-7), and fighter jet programs (F-16/F/A-18) in return for \$2 billion to support the Bosnia deployment.¹⁶ Both Clinton and Dole saw opportunities in this deal. As presidential candidates, both would be vying for California—a state with 54 electoral votes and the home of Northrop-Grumman, the B-2 Bomber producer—in the 1996 election. Although Senators Dole and McCain supported the President's commitment (after the deal had been brokered) and were willing to incur criticism from other Republican party members for their patriotic loyalty to the office of the President, this win-win situation was created as much from partisan politics and personal ambition as from patriotism.¹⁷

Under the Halperin and Allison framework for bureaucratic politics, the process which brought about the Bosnia deployment represented a decision game between the Executive and

Legislative branches, with each holding a differing view of the national security interest (i.e., the necessity of sending/funding troops for Bosnia) President Clinton believed he had no choice but to send troops to Bosnia. Exercising his powers as Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Armed Forces, he made the decision to deploy forces over the objection of the Congress, which was initially engaged in a policy game, focusing on its authority under the 1973 War Powers Resolution. After several attempts through procedural action channels to prevent the deployment by floor votes and resolutions (i.e., competition and bureaucratic battling), the two parties engaged in closed negotiations to resolve the stalemate. The negotiations evolved into another decision game, with the final outcome being that the Bosnia deployment would be funded and, in exchange, selected programs previously cut from the budget by the President would now be included. In the end, it was not until each player compromised on items of interest to the other player that an agreement could be concluded. Although one could argue that this case epitomizes pork barrel politics and inefficiency, it also upholds the intent of the founding fathers when they created a government of checks and balances — an invitation to struggle.

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- ³ Tim Zimmerman, "Hard Sell," *U S News and World Report*, December 4, 1995, 42
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- ⁵ Carroll J Doherty, "As Guns Fall Silent Near Sarajevo, U S Faces Peacekeeping Role," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, February 26, 1994, 484
- ⁶ Carroll J Doherty, "Clinton Vow to Provide Troops Revives War Powers Conflict," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, October 14, 1995, 3158
- ⁷ Donna Cassata and Pat Towell, "House votes to Block Clinton From Sending Peacekeepers," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, November 25, 1995, 3549
- ⁸ *Ibid*
- ⁹ Congress, Senate, *Disapproving Bosnia Deployment, Sending Troops*, 104th Cong , 1st sess , SCR 35, *Congressional Record*, 141, no 198, daily ed (13 December 1995) S18515
- ¹⁰ *Ibid*
- ¹¹ Congress, House, *Sense of the House of Representatives Relating to the Deployment of U S Armed Forces on the Ground in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 104th Cong 1st sess , HR247 *Congressional Record*, 141, no 169, daily ed (30 October 1995) H11381-82
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- ¹³ Senator Robert Dole, "Interview with Senator Robert Dole and Major General William Nash," Interview by Tim Russert, *NBC Meet the Press*, December 17, 1995, 5
- ¹⁴ Congress, Senate, S18543
- ¹⁵ Carroll J Doherty, "Clinton Vow to Provide Troops Revives War Powers Conflict," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, October 14, 1995, 3158
- ¹⁶ Donna Cassata, "Clinton Accepts Defense Bill in Bid for Bosnia Funds," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, December 2, 1995, 3672
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